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ABSTRACT

Any employment-related English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program, whether conducted on the job or as pre-employment training, results from five steps: conducting a need analysis of the language and cultural awareness needed to perform successfully in the workplace; developing a curriculum, based on objectives, that identifies and prioritizes tasks and skills for verbal interaction on the job; planning instruction; determining instructional strategies that keep the class focused on objectives and learner-centered, and includes paired and group work; and formative and summative program evaluation. Workplace curriculum topics may include workplace communication expectations, following directions and instructions, job-specific terminology, cross- cultural issues, company organization and culture, and career development and training. Student evaluation methods include checklists for recording student progress, learner-generated learning logs, and individual learner portfolios containing student work samples, testing results, and self-analysis. Contains 19 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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PAIE Q&A

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ERIC PAIE Q & A

June 1996

Project in Adult Immigrant Education PAIE
National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Workplace ESL Programs

by Allene Guss Grognet
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Any employment-related English as a second language (ESL) program, whether conducted on the job or as pre-employment training, is a result of five interrelated steps:

1. *Conducting a needs analysis* of the language and culture needed to perform successfully in a specific workplace or occupation. The needs analysis leads to the development of objectives for the program.
2. *Developing a curriculum*, based on the objectives, that identifies tasks and skills for verbal interaction on the job, and tasks and skills for reading and writing on the job. The curriculum should also prioritize these tasks and skills.
3. *Planning instruction* by gathering text material and realia, determining classroom activities, and identifying opportunities for learners to put their skills in practice outside the classroom.
4. *Determining instructional strategies* that include a variety of activities that focus on the objectives, keep the class learner-centered, and include as much paired and group work as possible. Strategies for assessment should also be determined when planning instruction.
5. *Evaluating the program* on both a formative and summative basis.

These steps are discussed below from the point of view of what the *educator* needs to consider in planning, implementing, and evaluating a program. However, throughout the process, the educator must remember that the "buy-in" of the *business partner*, especially at the level of the frontline supervisor, is indispensable to the success of any workplace ESL program (Kirby, 1989; Westerfield & Burt, 1996).

How should a needs analysis be conducted?

The needs analysis is perhaps the most crucial of the steps, because the remaining steps are based on it. Much has been written about how and why to do a needs analysis. Philippi (1991) describes a detailed process of observing workers on the job, interviewing all stakeholders, and collecting all written material to determine the basic skills needed on the job to do a specific job. Thomas, Grover, Cichon, Bird, and Harns (1991) provide a step-by-step guide on how to perform a task analysis for language minority employees. Burt and Saccomano (1995) discuss the value of a needs analysis that goes beyond the work floor to include union meetings and other places where workers interact on the job. Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987) talk about a needs assessment process that is more participatory as workers themselves identify the issues they wish to explore in the class. And Taggart (1996) points out that the emergent curriculum development process that takes place as the class progresses provides timely information to service providers and is less costly for employers.

Participatory learner-generated needs assessment is not antithetical to the traditional needs assessment process. Grognet (1994) stresses that for adults learning English as a second language, any instruction to help them succeed in the workplace is in their best interest and is by definition learner-centered. Lomperis (in press) asserts that having a curriculum framework generated from a pre-program needs assessment can facilitate the process of soliciting input from learners in the classroom. Finally, Mansoor (1995) speaks of the necessity for the needs analysis to be performed not solely for the jobs the participants have, but for the positions they aspire to, as well.

If the learners are already on the job, the analysis is conducted in that specific workplace. If learners are preparing for a job, several different environments in that occupation can be used for the needs analysis. In interviewing or surveying supervisors, managers, and nonnative and English-speaking employees, the same kinds of questions should be asked so that information from all these sources can be compared (Alamprese, 1994; Lynch, 1990).

For example, managers and supervisors might be asked if they perceive their employees experiencing difficulty in such common workplace tasks as following spoken instructions; explaining or giving instructions; reporting problems; asking questions if they don't understand something; communicating with co-workers; communicating on the telephone; communicating in group or team meetings; making suggestions; reading job-related manuals; filling out forms; writing memos, letters, or reports; reading notices, newsletters, or short reports; doing job-related math computations; interpreting graphs, charts, or diagrams; or following safety standards and measures. Employees or learners should also be asked if they have difficulties with these tasks. Next, or simultaneously, educators go to the workplace to see the jobs performed and the language used on the job. At the same time, all of the written materials used in the workplace or in that occupation—for example, manuals, notices, safety instructions, and office forms—should be collected and analyzed for linguistic difficulty. Meetings and other team activities should also be observed for language use.

Perhaps the most important part of the needs analysis is the reconciliation, where one takes the information from managers and supervisors, employees and learners, puts it together with personal observation, and lists and prioritizes the language needed on the job. This in turn leads to forming the objectives for the program. Program objectives developed in this way are based not only on what one party has reported, and not solely on observation, but on a combination of factors.

What major areas should be considered in curriculum development?

While needs vary within each worksite or occupation, there are general areas that should be considered in curriculum development. Some of these areas, with examples of specific linguistic and cultural competencies, are outlined below. Not all tasks and functions are

taught at every worksite to every participant. However, along with the information from the needs analysis and from learner input, these topics form the backbone of the curriculum.

Workplace Curriculum Topics

1. **Workplace Communication Expectations**
   - greeting coworkers
   - asking questions
   - making "small talk"
   - reporting problems and progress
   - calling in sick or late
   - requesting time off or permission to leave early
   - responding to interruption and criticism
   - making suggestions
   - accepting and declining requests and invitations
   - asking for and giving clarification and verification
   - apologizing
2. **Following Directions and Instructions**
   - identifying listening strategies for directions
   - understanding quality control language
   - understanding words of sequencing
   - giving feedback to directions
   - asking for, giving, and following directions
   - giving and responding to warnings
   - understanding and following worksite rules
   - following safety rules
3. **Job-Specific Terminology**
   - identification of one's job
   - enumeration of the tasks
   - description of the tasks
   - identification and description of tools, equipment and machinery
   - identification of products and processes
4. **Cross-cultural Factors**
   - food and eating habits
   - personal hygiene, habits, and appearance
   - cultural values of America and the American workplace
   - understanding workplace hierarchies
   - understanding "unwritten rules"
   - recognizing problems and understanding appropriate problem-solving strategies
5. **Company Organization and Culture**
   - management functions
   - union functions
   - personnel policies, procedures, and benefits
   - performance evaluations
   - rewards and recognition
6. **Upgrading and Training**
   - understanding career opportunities
   - understanding the need for training
   - understanding what a "valued" worker is

Other factors also matter. Understanding situations in which pronunciation makes a difference, such as in describing work processes and procedures or in giving oral instructions, is important as are literacy initiatives (e.g., reading posted notices, production reports, and forms; writing an accident report; and keeping a written log). However, for the language minority worker, the curriculum should start with workplace communication and end with company organization and culture, and skills upgrading.

What should be considered when planning lessons?

Lesson planning includes gathering text material and realia (e.g., those manuals, signs, and job aids that were analyzed during the needs analysis process) and any tools and equipment possible. From these, classroom activities that involve listening, speaking, reading, and writing can then be designed. However, language practice should not be limited to the classroom. Learners should leave the classroom after each session able to perform at least one new linguistic skill. For example, they might be able to pronounce the names of three pieces of equipment, know how to interrupt politely, or use the index of their personnel manual to find information on sick leave policy. To this end, instruction must include activities that use language needed by learners either on the job or in the wider community.

The educator may have input into revising written materials used at the worksite as a way of resolving worker performance problems on the job (Westerfield & Burt, 1996). Guidelines for adapting written material found on the job follow:

Adapting Written Materials

- Make the topic/idea clear.
- Reduce the number of words in a sentence and sentences in a paragraph wherever possible.
- Rewrite sentences in subject-verb-object word order.
- Change sentences written in the passive voice to the active voice wherever possible.
- Introduce new vocabulary in context and reinforce its use throughout the text.
- Eliminate as many relative clauses as possible.
- Use nouns instead of pronouns, even though it may sound repetitious.
- Rewrite paragraphs into charts, graphs, and other diagrams wherever possible.
- Make sure that expectations of prior knowledge are clear, and if necessary, provide background material.
- Eliminate extraneous material.

What are characteristics of learner-centered instruction?

All workplace ESL (and all adult ESL in general) should be learner-centered. If language learning is to be successful, the learners' needs, rather than the grammar or functions of language, must form the core of the curriculum and the instruction.

Many educators, among them Auerbach (1992), Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987), and Nash, Cason, Rhum, McGrail, and Gomez-Sanford (1992), have written about the learner-centered ESL class. In a learner-centered class, the teacher creates a supportive environment in which learners can take initiative in choosing what and how they want to learn. The teacher does not give up control of the classroom, but rather structures and orders the learning process, guiding and giving feedback to learners so that their needs, as well as the needs of the workplace, are being addressed. In a traditional teacher-centered classroom, where the teacher makes all the decisions, learners are sometimes stifled. At the same time, too much freedom given to learners, especially those from cultures where the teacher is the sole and absolute classroom authority, may cause learners to feel that the teacher has abandoned them (Shank & Terrill, 1995). The teacher must determine the right mix of license and guidance.

The following are characteristics of learner-centered classrooms:

1. What happens in the language classroom is a negotiated process between learners and the teacher. The content and sequence of the workplace curriculum is seen as a starting point for classroom interaction and for learner generation of their own occupational learning materials. The language presented and practiced in a good adult ESL text is usually based on situations and contexts that language minority adults have in common. When one adds to this the exigencies of a particular workplace or occupation, another layer of learning is presented to the learner.

2. Problem solving occupies a good portion of any adult's life, so it is not surprising that problem-solving activities are a necessary part of learner-centered curricula. Problem-solving exercises should be prominent in any workplace classroom. Learners can be asked what they would say or do in a particular situation, or about their own experiences in circumstances similar to those presented by the teacher. Learners can also be asked to present the pro's and con's of a situation, to negotiate, to persuade, or to generate problem-solving and simulation activities from their own lives. By presenting and solving problems in the classroom, learners become confident in their ability to use language to solve problems and to take action in the workplace and in the larger social sphere. These problem-solving activities are especially valuable in high-performance workplaces where work is team-based and workplace decisions are made through group negotiation (Taggart, 1996).

3. The traditional roles of the teacher as planner of content, sole deliverer of instruction, controller of the classroom, and evaluator of achievement change dramatically in a learner-centered classroom. When the classroom atmosphere is collaborative, the teacher becomes facilitator, moderator, group leader, coach, manager of processes and procedures, giver of feedback, and partner in learning. This is true whether the teacher has planned a whole-class, small-group, paired, or individual activity. (See Shank and Terrill, 1995, for discussion of when and how to group learners.)

4. In managing communicative situations in a learner-centered environment, teachers set the stage for learners to experiment with language, negotiate meaning, make mistakes, and monitor and evaluate their own language learning progress. Language is essentially a social function acquired through interaction with others in one-to-one and group situations. Learners process meaningful discourse and produce language in response to other human beings. The teacher is responsible for establishing the supportive environment in which this can happen. This does not mean that the teacher never corrects errors; it means that the teacher knows when and how to deal with error correction and can help learners understand when errors will interfere with effective, comprehensible communication.

What are learner-centered instructional strategies?

Some strategies that are especially useful for workplace ESL programs are:

- Using authentic language in the classroom.
- Placing the learning in workplace and other adult contexts relevant to the lives of learners, their families, and friends.
- Using visual stimuli for language learning, where appropriate, and progressing from visual to text-oriented material. While effective for all language learners, this progression taps into the natural learning strategies of low-literate individuals who often use visual clues in place of literacy skills (Holt, 1995).
- Emphasizing paired and group work, because learners acquire language through interaction with others on meaningful tasks in meaningful contexts. It also sets the stage for teamwork in the workplace (Taggart, 1996).
- Adopting a whole language orientation—integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to reflect natural language use.
- Choosing activities that help learners transfer what they learn in the classroom to the worlds in which they live.
- Treating the learning of grammar as a discovery process, with a focus on understanding the rules for language only after learners have already used and internalized the language. In this way, grammar is not a separate part of the curriculum, but rather is infused throughout.
- Integrating new cultural skills with new linguistic skills. Learners acquire new language and cultural behaviors appropriate to the U.S. workplace, and the workplace becomes a less strange and frightening environment.

Various types of exercises and activities can be used in a learner-centered environment. These include question and answer, matching, identification, interview, fill-in, labeling, and alphabetizing; using charts and graphs; doing a Total Physical Response (TPR) activity; playing games such as Concentration and Twenty Questions; creating role-plays and simulations; developing a Language Experience Approach (LEA) story; or writing in a dialogue journal. (See Holt, 1995, and Peyton and Crandall, 1995, for a discussion of these and other adult ESL class activities.)

What about assessing learner progress?

Testing is part of teaching. Funders may mandate that programs use commercially available tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Achievement System (CASAS). These tests, when used in combination with program-developed, performance-based measures, can provide a clear picture of what has been learned in the class. (See Burt and Keenan, 1995, for a discussion of learner assessment in adult ESL instruction.) Performance-based tests measure the learner's ability to apply what has been learned to specific, real-life tasks. Actual job artifacts such as pay stubs, job schedules, and company manuals can be used to assess linguistic skills. Further, program-developed materials lend themselves well to workplace ESL instruction in that they allow both learners and teachers to see progress in the outlined objectives over time. Some program-developed assessment instruments are discussed below:

Program-Developed Assessment Instruments

1. Checklists (e.g., aural/oral, reading, writing)
2. Learner-generated learning logs
3. Portfolios (e.g. written classwork, learner self-analysis, program-developed tests)

Checklists. Objectives for the course, or even for each lesson, can form the basis of a checklist. For instance, an *aural/oral checklist* for high-beginning learners might include such items as 1) uses level-appropriate words and phrases to respond verbally to spoken language; 2) uses extended speech to respond verbally to spoken language; 3) initiates conversation; 4) participates in small group or paired activities; 5) follows oral directions for a process; and 6) asks for clarification.

A checklist for *reading* might include such items as 1) recognizes appropriate sight words (e.g., words on safety signs); 2) recognizes words in context; 3) shows evidence of skimming;

4) shows evidence of scanning; 5) reads simplified job aids or manuals; and 6) reads paycheck information.

A checklist for *writing* might include entries such as 1) fills out simple forms; 2) makes entries into work log; and 3) writes requests for time-off.

Learner-generated learning logs. In a notebook, such page headings as "Things I Learned This Month"; "Things I Find Easy in English"; "Things I Find Hard in English"; "Things I Would Like to Be Able to Do in My Work in English" create categories that help learners see growth in their English language skills over time. If learners make an entry on one or more pages every week, then review the logs with their teachers every three months, they usually see progress, even if it is slight. This also helps teachers to individualize instruction.

Portfolios. These individual learner folders include samples of written work, all pre- and post-testing, self analysis, and program-developed assessment instruments. Portfolio contents also tend to show growth in vocabulary, fluency, and the mechanics of writing over time.

What kind of program evaluation is necessary?

Formative evaluation, performed while a program is in operation, should be a joint process between a third-party evaluator and program personnel. Together, they should review the curriculum to make sure it reflects the program objectives as formulated through the needs analysis process. They should also review all instructional materials (e.g., commercial texts and program-developed materials) to see that they meet workplace and learner needs. Finally, the third-party evaluator should periodically observe the classroom to evaluate instruction and learner/teacher interaction.

Summative evaluation, done at the completion of a program, should evaluate both the learner and the program. Learner evaluation data can be taken from formal pre- and post-tests as well as from learner self-analysis, learner writings, interviews, and program-developed assessments (Burt & Saccomano, 1995).

A summative program evaluation should be completed by a third party. The third party evaluator analyzes the above summative data that includes information from all the stakeholders (i.e., teachers, employers, union representatives, and learners) about what worked and did not work in the program, and why. The evaluator also looks at relationships among all the stakeholders. This analysis will yield more qualitative than quantitative data. However, there are processes to quantify qualitative information through matrices, scales, and charts, as discussed in Alamprese, 1994; Lynch, 1990; and Sperazi & Jurmo, 1994.

Conclusion

By following the steps discussed in this digest, a workplace or pre-employment ESL program should meet the needs of employers, outside funders, and learners. The best advertisement for a workplace program is employers choosing to continue instructional programs because they see marked improvement in their employees' work performance. The best advertisement for a pre-employment program is learners using English skills on jobs they have acquired because of their training.

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